Ref TL84

east timor news agency
agência de notícias de timor leste
ETNA

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JAPAN UNDER INCREASING CRITICISM IN U.N.

Geneva, 24 February (ETNA) - Over lunches and dinners with Latin American diplomats and in the corridors of the Palais des Nations, the usually low-key and discrete Japanese diplomats try to impress everyone who cares to listen that the way "to help the East Timorese" is not by having a resolution adopted in the Commission of Human Rights.

Japan, the largest aid donor and investor in Indonesia, is certainly a key Indonesian ally in the battle this month in the Palais des Nations over a resolution condemning the massacre of unarmed civilians on November 12, 1991 in Dili, East Timor.

Being an Asian country, Japan sits in the Asian regional group. But being an industrialised country, it also sits in the WEAO (Western European and Others) group. A western diplomat commented to ETNA, on condition of anonimity: "Japan finds itself in a difficult balancing act, trying on one hand to show that it cares about human rights, but on the other it has to show also solidarity with its Asian partners such as Burma, China, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, the worst violators of human rights in the world."

Hoping to get along well with both worlds, Japan tries desperately and sometimes not so discretely to block resolutions which would force it to take a clear stand. Hence the powerful, diminutive Japanese Ambassador, Mr Katsumi Sezaki, prefers to have "consensus decisions on most situations such as East Timor which would provide Japan with the perfect win-win situation", a human rights expert commented to ETNA.

However, in the view of many, there is an increasing frustration within the WEAO group over Japan's double membership, with one diplomat accusing the Japanese of spying in the Western group and informing the Asians about the tactics of the Europeans. "The Japanese will have to take a stand. We cannot go along with their selfish approach", the same expert said.

Some NGO's and government delegations are beginning to look seriously into Japan's own human rights record, both over its "horrendous treatment of migrant workers as well as its own national minorities".

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